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TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION
Tuesday, December 13, 2005

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#). Iranian Nuclear Program

Key stories in the media:

Major media reported on the Mehlis report, which was delivered yesterday to the UN Security council, claiming that Syrian and Lebanese intelligence knew about the plot to assassinate Hariri, though at this stage, according to Ha'aretz, no sanctions are to be imposed on Syria. According to a report published in Yediot Aharonot, Israel assisted UN special investigator Mehlis and gave him material that ties Syrian intelligence organizations with the Hariri murder. All media also reported on the killing yesterday, by a car bomb, of journalist Gibran Tuani, editor of an anti-Syrian publication, the latest in a string of assassinations of anti-Syrian figures in Lebanon.

A related report in Yediot Aharonot says Israel will not encourage US and EU decisionmakers to take steps toward removing Syria's Assad from power. This emerged in a discussion Prime Minister Ari'el Sharon held with the foreign minister, defense minister, the NSC head, and the heads of the the intelligence community. PM Sharon instructed the intelligence officials to avoid contact with mediators who offer to launch a secret track of contacts with Syria, which Sharon maintained, are only meant to lift international pressure off Syria. A security source reportedly said yesterday that the Syrians will try to increase tension on the northern border in an attempt to divert the world's attention from them, and the Northern Command was instructed to deploy accordingly.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the European Union on Monday, chose not to endorse or publish a draft report highly critical of Israel's activity in East Jerusalem, particularly of the security barrier and "illegal settlement" activity. Israeli officials welcomed the decision of the EU's 25 foreign ministers, who considered whether to accept the report at a meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of EU foreign ministers in Brussels. Israeli diplomats objected to the report, calling its language "very unpleasant" and suggesting its formal adoption could threaten relations between Israel and the EU. Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev described the move not to adopt the report as "the right decision." Yediot Aharonot added that the publication of the report was prevented due to an Italian veto, showing once again that "Italy is one of Israel's closest friends in Europe."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel decided on Monday night to partially ease the closure around the West Bank. The more lax restrictions would permit passage of 28,000 workers from Judea and Samaria into Israel. An additional 9,500 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip were allowed to enter Israel. Israel Radio reported that the more relaxed travel conditions were not extended to Jenin and Tulkarm, which remain under closure since the suicide bombing in Netanya last week. The Jerusalem Post also reported that in a recently

held joint Shin Bet and IDF operation in the West Bank, a "Hizballah gun-for-hire" who led a seven-man cell was detained in the Nabulus area.

The IDF Radio cited Palestinian sources as saying that a Gaza farmer was shot and killed last night by IDF soldiers, but an army spokesman said IDF soldiers did not fire at any targets in Gaza. The radio added that three Palestinians and two IDF soldiers were wounded in a Nabulus clash last night.

Reporting on a Dahaf poll of Likud Party members, held six days before the primaries and after Shaul Mofaz quit Likud and joined Kadima, Yediot Aharonot says that while Netanyahu keeps his 39% of the vote, leading as candidate for Likud chairman, Silvan Shalom went up from 14% to 29%, apparently gaining from Mofaz's move. The poll shows Feiglin gaining too, going from 8% two weeks ago to 11% yesterday, and Minister Yisra'el Katz advanced from 2% to 6%. Maariv poll results show the same trend, with slightly different results: Binyamin Netanyahu receives 45.5% among those who intend to vote and 35.3% among all respondents; Silvan Shalom: 22% among those who intend to vote and 22.5% among all respondents; Moshe Feiglin: 15.5% among those who intend to vote and 11.8% among all respondents; and Yisrael Katz: 2.7% among those who intend to vote; 2.5% among all respondents.

1. Iranian Nuclear Program

Summary

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el writes in independent, left-leaning Haaretz: "International organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Security Council are bound by two fundamental understandings that accompany its treatment of Iranian nuclear power. The first is that there is no military option, certainly not while the war in Iraq teaches a daily lesson to those who support this option; and the second is that in light of Iran's strong economic standing and its special ties with China and Russia, it would be unrealistic to threaten it with economic sanctions. To these basic understandings we should add the American attempt to get Iran involved in pacifying Iraq so that it could finally start considering a pullout date.. Meanwhile, it seems that the more Israel raises the Iranian issue, the more distant a solution becomes. The double trap - that of the United States against its partners, Russia and China, and that of Israel, which seeks to convince others that Iran poses a world threat - plays right into Iranian hands."

Bloc quotes

"Ahmadinejad Can Keep Smiling"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el writes in independent, left-leaning Haaretz: "The following statistics will help explain the difficulty of imposing economic sanctions on Iran: In the beginning of 2006, total trade between Iran and China will reach some \$8 billion, and by the end of 2006 it will rise to \$10 billion; the gas pipeline between Iran and India will cost some \$10 billion, and is meant to provide for a significant portion of India's gas needs; and Russia is set to sign an agreement to sell Iran \$1 billion-worth of weapons. Iran, which is becoming transformed by world oil prices into an ever wealthier state and one that can pay for its deals primarily in cash, is economically prosperous. It appears that it's leadership thinks its in such a good position that it can reject a Russian compromise proposal on the nuclear issue, and that it can depend on China to veto any sanction the United Nations may decide to impose.. This standing of Iran, and particularly the dependence of Russia and China on Iran (along with other countries like Japan, India, and Pakistan, which have no veto power in the UN Security Council), creates the impression that the West does not have a real option of dealing with the threat of Iran's nuclear weapons - whether it is true or false. This impression is very close to reality, as long as international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Security Council are bound by two fundamental understandings that accompany its treatment of Iranian nuclear power. The first is that there is no military option, certainly not while the war in Iraq teaches a daily lesson to those who support this option; and the second is that in light of Iran's strong economic standing and its special ties with China and Russia, it would be unrealistic to threaten it with economic sanctions. To these basic understandings we should add the American attempt to get Iran involved in pacifying Iraq so that it could finally start considering a pullout date. In the last

two weeks, US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad has been trying to find an Iranian interlocutor on the issue, so far unsuccessfully. These attempts further strengthen the feeling of Iranian power. Moreover, an Iranian nuclear weapon is viewed by Europe, Russia, and China only as breaching the world balance of power, not as a direct threat to them. This is in complete opposition to the position of Israel, which is not particularly impressed by breaches of the world balance of power, as it doesn't protest the development of Indian or Pakistani nuclear power (and itself never endorsed the NPT). Israel sees Iranian nuclear power as a direct threat to it, and only to it. That's where another reason for the international shoulder shrugging comes in: Iranian nuclear power is considered almost exclusively an Israeli problem, and this fact makes it even more difficult to get the world to act jointly against Iran. Meanwhile, it seems that the more Israel raises the Iranian issue, the more distant a solution becomes. The double trap - that of the United States against its partners, Russia and China, and that of Israel, which seeks to convince others that Iran poses a world threat - plays right into Iranian hands. Even if Iran does not end up producing a nuclear weapon, it will be able to continue holding the whip of the threat of producing it and rely on global disagreements to rescue it."

JONES